

Turbulent Terrains: The Contradictions and Politics of Decentralised Conservation

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Abstract

The most salient feature of conservation today is contradiction. Conservation is simultaneously characterized by decentralisation and recentralisation, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, deregulation and reregulation. At the heart of these contradictions are reconfigurations of state-society relations, provoking unprecedented risk but also opportunity for rural communities. Paramount to these processes is the threat of ‘recentralizing while decentralizing’ (Ribot et al. 2006). Governments decentralise authority while simultaneously finding ways to retain central control and maintain their political and/or economic interests. Recentralising while decentralising especially defines Tanzania’s most recent decentralisation scheme, Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). This paper contributes to the debate about WMAs and the nature of decentralisation. The WMAs, I argue, represent risk but also opportunity for rural communities. Amidst the contradictions and conundrum of decentralising and recentralising, new political spaces invariably emerge, wherein novel alliances, political community, and resistance unfold. In cases like Enduimet and Lake Natron WMAs, this has translated into appropriating and redeploying WMAs in ways that privilege community interests. Notwithstanding the significant constraints that continue jeopardizing most WMAs, the cases reviewed in this paper offer some hope for WMAs’ turbulent terrains.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, globalisation, conservation, governance, decentralisation, wildlife management areas, Tanzania, Africa

INTRODUCTION

One of the most salient features of conservation governance today is contradiction. Scholarship on conservation highlights its prevailing patterns of decentralisation and recentralisation, deregulation and reregulation. There is state roll-back, while at the same time state roll-out, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, empowerment but also disempowerment. Invariably, at the heart of these contradictions is the state and its role in conservation while also the role and position of

communities, as they confront prevailing reconfigurations of state, society, and market (Castree 2010; Igoe and Brockington 2007; Brosius et al. 2005; Hulme and Murphree 2001). Put another way, it is about the role of communities vi-s à-vis novel forms of green states, green markets, and green grabbing (Fairhead et al. 2012; Benjaminsen and Bryceson 2012; Goldman 2001).

In part, arising from populist advocacy but also largely from neoliberalisation, state-society relations in conservation have changed dramatically in recent decades. States have been retrenched and communities supposedly empowered through community-based conservation (CBC) or community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) initiatives (Dressler et al. 2010; Agrawal and Gibson 2001). At the same time, dressed in neoliberalism’s new apparel, states have been restructured and their roles redirected to pave the way for the markets (Igoe and Brockington 2007; Brockington and Duffy 2011). Accordingly then, as states reregulate, roll-out, reterritorialize and re-entrench in new ways, new conservation contradictions ensue.

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One of the most prominent contradiction of today's conservation is decentralisation and recentralisation, or as Ribot, Agrawal, and Larson (2006) aptly conceive it, 'recentralising while decentralizing'. Ribot (2002) defines decentralisation as "when a central government formally transfers power to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy" (page 3). With the escalation of efforts to roll back governments and incentivize rural inhabitants, decentralisation has become instrumental in today's conservation projects (Ribot et al. 2005). At the same time though, for a host of licit and/or illicit reasons, central governments commonly deploy mechanisms to inhibit decentralisation, retain control and discipline citizens in line with its own, as well as global investors' interests. Such government resistance to decentralisation is referred to as recentralisation, and includes formal and informal institutions that constrain and limit decentralising efforts (Ribot et al. 2006).

This paper examines the tensions of recentralization and decentralization in Tanzania's recent conservation scheme, Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). The WMAs have important implications for decentralisation and neoliberal conservation across the African continent and in general throughout the Global South. In stark contrast to fortress conservation orthodoxies, WMAs decentralize management of wildlife and other resources to rural communities while promising them benefits from respective tourism ventures (Nelson et al 2009; Goldman 2003). Similar to neoliberal, decentralisation rhetoric elsewhere in the world, proponents (e.g. government authorities, aid donors, and international conservation agencies) argue that WMAs represent win-win solutions. They simultaneously represent a win for conservation, tourism investment, national finance and rural development.

In stark contrast to such claims, critics argue that, in practice, WMAs merely amount to 'green grabbing' (Green and Adams 2014; Benjaminsen and Bryceson 2012). Effectively, they increase central government control over people, land and wildlife, foster market expansion, enable rent-seeking and facilitate 'accumulation by dispossession' (Igoe and Croucher 2007; Nelson and Agrawal 2008; Benjaminsen et al. 2013). In 2007, Nelson et al. offered an early warning about discrepancies between decentralisation policy and practice. Igoe and Croucher (2007) warn about state reterritorialisations, reregulations, commerce and subsequent dispossession. More recently, Noe and Kangalawe (2015) highlight the disempowering outcomes of WMAs. Bluwstein et al. (2016) document the 'conservation bias' that typically defines management plans, prevailing trends of recentralisation and adverse balances of power that jeopardize local livelihoods. Moyo et al. (2016) further outline such harmful patterns and highlight the persisting denials among government and NGO proponents who continue espousing the win-win rhetoric despite the daunting realities that are unfolding across most WMA landscapes.

Drawing on WMA developments in northern Tanzania (Enduimet and Lake Natron), this paper paints a slightly different picture. While I concur with the above analyses,

I maintain that this is not the full story. While WMAs undoubtedly cause problems, comprise risks and introduce new challenges, they also introduce new opportunities. I emphasize how community actors are employing the political spaces that open up via such initiatives and the politics, contestation, and resistance that arise. Accordingly, I conceive WMAs, and other decentralisation schemes like them, as comprising 'new political spaces' (Cornwall and Coelho 2007; Haarstad 2012). In such spaces, new politics and novel forms of citizen-government engagements can influence conservation policy and practice. Following on Green and Adams (2014), I argue that unexpected dynamics are emerging as local actors 'learn to play the game' (113). As I argue elsewhere (Wright 2016), decentralisation in neoliberal conservation invariably fosters 'turbulence' (see James Rosenau 1997, 2003) – a convergence of processes wherein the state's authority is decentered, global flows unfold, spheres of authority shift, and localisation processes provoke new forms of political community as well as reinvigorated defenses of place (see Prazniak and Dirljik 2001). The WMAs, as well as other decentralised conservation regimes like them, represent 'turbulent terrains' and under such conditions, opportunities may arise to disrupt status quos. The politics and achievements in Enduimet and Lake Natron WMAs represent cases in point.

Following scholars like Anne Larson (Larson and Soto 2008; Larson 2005, 2003), I propose that more attention needs to be given in our analysis of decentralisation to local political domains, emergent networks and conservation's local subjects. The latter remain the 'brokers and translators' in development schemes (Lewis and Mosse 2006), strategically and often innovatively engaging new regimes of rule and capital flows. In her work, Larson emphasises that beyond the domains of legal structure, formal rules and regulations, economic structures and central authority, lie the micropolitics of the 'local decision-making sphere' (2003, p.221). In this sphere, capacities emerge (both technical and socio-political ones), power relations are made and remade, new alliances are built, meanings are made and ideologies animate social struggles. Decentralisation, Larson importantly argues, is always an iterative, dynamic political process. Accordingly, 'decentralization from below' (Larson 2005, 2003) can emerge as power, participation and democracy are forged anew in conservation spaces.

In part, my analysis of decentralisation recalls Tania Li's important criticism of development scholarship and the distinction she makes between the 'practice of government' and the 'practice of politics' (2007). The former captures the official structures and strategies that governments deploy in operationalizing state projects, while the latter captures the situated struggles and place politics that such projects confront. The 'practice of politics' articulates state projects through a 'refusal of the way things are' and opening up 'a front of struggle' (Li, 12). In my reading, much literature on decentralisation generally, and WMAs specifically, tends to illuminate well the 'practice of government' while sometimes inadvertently obscuring 'the practice of politics' that concurrently articulate them.

METHODS

The study presents findings from ethnographic research I have been conducting since 2010, while also reflecting observations while living and working in Tanzania since 2003. The bulk of work reported below is from 12 months of field research in 2013, followed by shorter field visits (of 14 weeks in total) between 2014 and 2016. I lived and worked with communities affiliated with the Enduimet and Lake Natron WMAs, participated in daily operations and key WMA deliberations and planning meetings, accompanied political protests and demonstrations, and joined government meetings and national planning initiatives. Additionally, I interviewed a range of actors affiliated with WMA governance across various scales, from local village leaders to WMA managers, central government officials and international NGO personnel. The research was conducted mainly in Swahili with some interviews conducted in the Maa language with the help of a research assistant and translator.

RECENTRALISING-DECENTRALISING CONUNDRUMS IN TANZANIA – A BRIEF HISTORY

Tanzania maintains one of the biggest conservation estates in the world (close to 40% of its land mass), supporting the country's burgeoning photographic and hunting tourist industries (Benjaminsen et al. 2013). Although historically Tanzania has been (and remains) a bastion of fortress conservation, the concept of WMAs emerged out of the country's neoliberal restructuring, beginning in the late 1980s and proceeding through the 1990s (Green and Adams 2014; Wright 2016). They arose specifically out of a USAID-funded project entitled, Planning and Assessment for Wildlife Management (PAWM), which aimed to restructure the wildlife sector (Leader-Williams 2000; Leader-Williams, Kayera, and Overton 1996). In line with prevailing trends of neoliberalisation, PAWM sought to optimize the hunting and photographic tourism industries through state deregulation, foreign investment, marketization, decentralisation, and offering incentives to rural Tanzanians for conserving wildlife.

The WMAs have been only slowly and often dubiously rolled-out since their inception in the 1998 Wildlife Policy (Nelson et al. 2007). Allegations abound about the government's resistance to them, given the prospective loss of revenue they represent for central government authorities and the disruption of long-standing patron-client relations (Nelson and Agrawal 2008). In all, seventeen WMAs have already been registered in Tanzania with approximately 22 in the process (USAID 2013). They encompass large territories and may grow to include 13% of the country's territory (Sosovele 2015).

The WMAs are meant to decentralise wildlife management and tourism business and hand them over to rural communities, specifically village governments (for details on the policies and governance structures see Goldman 2003; Nelson et al. 2009; Igoe and Croucher 2007; Green and Adams 2014). Suffice it to say that WMAs allow villages to come together

to designate and register contiguous parcels of land for the purpose of wildlife conservation and tourism. Once registered, the government's Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (MNRT), through its Wildlife Division and corresponding Director of Wildlife, provides wildlife user-rights to the WMA's elected-representative body, the Authorized Association.

Authorized Associations are responsible for the management of WMAs on behalf of and in collaboration with member villages. Key among Authorized Association responsibilities is designing a land use management plan for the village areas that are designated to the WMA. This plan is called a Resource Zone Management Plan (RZMP) or alternatively, General Management Plan (GMP). The management plans illustrate the various tourism zones of the WMA (e.g. photographic versus hunting), and document the customary resource uses that are prohibited or accepted in them, such as livestock grazing, fishing, timber collection, and bee-keeping. Degrees of integrating customary uses versus excluding them in tourist zones vary widely across different WMAs. Importantly, the Authorized Association's mandate also includes the creation and formalization of joint business ventures with hunting and photographic tourism enterprise, management of revenues, and the fair distribution of benefits to member villages. Such business opportunities and revenues are the key incentives for villages to join WMAs. It is important to note that Tanzania's regulations on tourism make other forms of joint ventures (e.g., direct contracts between tour operators and village governments) essentially untenable, and more often than not, illegal!

Of particular importance to this paper is the power that the central government retains in WMAs and the upward accountability that results (Bluwstein et al. 2016). The central government retains powers of oversight, advising, and arbitration. Of primary concern is the power of the Director of Wildlife to approve or disprove the Authorized Association's proposed RZMP or GMP – effectively, maintaining a veto power over zoning stipulations and corresponding community interests. Additionally, central government retains much influence through the District Natural Resource Advisory Body, which is ascribed an advising mandate according to WMA regulations. This district body is comprised largely of central government appointees, including the District Commissioner. Despite their official role as merely advisors, these central government authorities often influence WMA trajectories significantly and sometimes fully dictate to them, thus recentralizing the power supposedly devolved to WMAs (USAID 2013). However, the diverse community responses to these dynamics can lead to unexpected consequences as I will now demonstrate.

RESULTS - A TALE OF TWO WMAs

This section outlines a collection of landmark conflicts in the Enduimet and Lake Natron WMAs, conveying the turbulence and new political spaces that have emerged. I focus on some key achievements to resist recentralisation, government

authoritarianism and business exploitation. These WMAs are situated in the Longido District of northern Tanzania along the Tanzania-Kenya border, encompassing the area between Lake Natron and Mount Kilimanjaro (Figure 1). It is important to note at the outset that these WMAs comprise some distinct features. A vast majority of the stakeholders implicated in the WMA identify as pastoral Maasai. Residents and respective leaders share an ethnic history that remains a strong source of identity and solidarity (Hodgson 2001, 2011). Most notably, given their shared cultural interests, the WMA leadership is united in its prioritisation of livestock production, which is the dominant livelihood in both WMAs. Arguably, these factors help facilitate the collective action and outcomes witnessed below.

Enduimet WMA

The Enduimet WMA is situated in the dry savannah at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro. It has a relatively high density of iconic wildlife (e.g., lion, leopard, giraffe, wildebeest, zebra, etc.) but is mostly renowned for its population of elephants that transverse the area from Amboseli National Park to the north in Kenya and the Kilimanjaro National Park to the south. It covers 1,300 square kilometers with nine villages and approximately 27,000 residents (District Councilor pers. comm. 2013). Enduimet is one of the original pilot WMAs in Tanzania, receiving its wildlife user-rights in 2007. Revenue from joint-tourist ventures amounted to \$170,000 USD in 2015 (WMA personnel, pers. comm. 2016). This is poised to

increase with more trophy hunting activities expected, and with the resolution of the legal case discussed below (Authorized Association leader, pers. comm. 2015). In accordance with WMA regulations, up to half of the revenue is used for operating the WMA while the rest is distributed to village members for development activities (e.g., water, health and education).

The WMA's Authorized Association is made up of three elected representatives from each of the member villages, chaired by a former District Councilor. The Authorized Association is overseen by a Board of Trustees, which includes some highly educated residents, previous District Councilors and high ranking politicians, including a well-known and respected Member of Parliament. Collectively, the Authorized Association and Board of Trustees bring together a range of important political skills, knowledge, networks and alliances. These were all key in three landmark events and achievements in Enduimet WMA's history: the elimination of a trophy hunting block, the successful resistance to conservation restrictions and the eviction of an unwanted tour operator.

Some background is required to understand the hunting issue. Since the late 1990s, one member village, Sinya, was embroiled in conflict with central government officials and a trophy hunting operator, the Northern Hunting Company (Trench et al. 2009; Honey 2008; Wright 2016). The company and central government opposed Sinya leaders' decision to host photographic tourism activities on its land, which overlapped the hunting block the company leased from the government. After a lengthy legal battle, the court ruled on behalf of Northern Hunting. This was a highly contentious

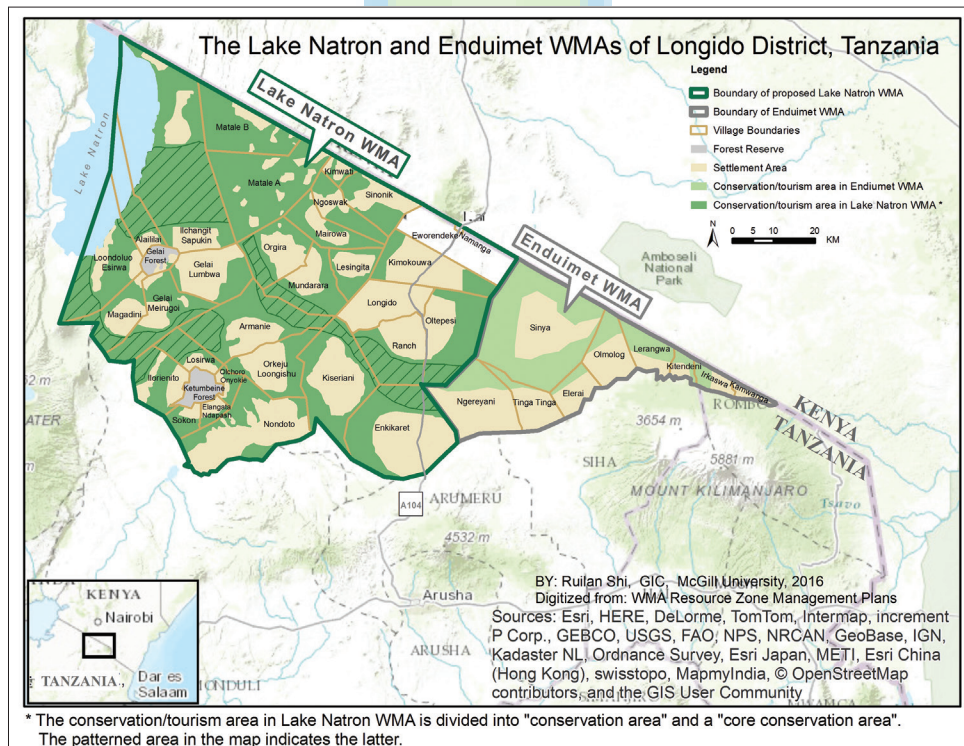


Figure 1
Lake Natron and Enduimet WMAs

ruling, blatantly privileging trophy hunting and centralised control over village land rights and authority. The case fueled much resentment in Sinya.

The historical case is important here because, in part, it served to redirect the village's trajectory vis à vis the Enduimet WMA. While originally rejecting WMA membership, Sinya finally joined it in 2009. At least in part, the decision was an effort to reignite their struggle against the hunting industry. "We joined the WMA because we knew we would then have the authority to evict Northern Hunting," said one Authorized Association leader. In general, Sinya leaders envisioned more authority over their land through the devolved nature of WMA governance and most importantly, the WMA's mandate to re-zone land use.

Accordingly, in 2010, with Sinya as a new member of the WMA, the Authorized Association began compiling its second RZMP for the years 2011 to 2016. As expected, the ensuing meetings included much deliberation about the value of trophy hunting. Sinya leaders were prominent in the discussions, adamantly building a case for photographic tourism over trophy hunting. Expectedly, central government authorities insisted on prioritising hunting. Nevertheless, to the chagrin of central authorities, the meeting ultimately built a strong resistance toward Northern Hunting specifically and trophy hunting more generally. Subsequently, the RZMP eliminated the contentious hunting block in Sinya, replacing it with a photographic tourism zone. Such a move was unprecedented in Tanzania.

The RZMP was approved by the Director of Wildlife on January 11, 2012 (Enduimet Authorized Association 2011). Reportedly, there was some resistance from the Director as eliminating a government hunting block in such fashion would reduce revenues and disappoint powerful investors. Authorized Association leaders remained persistent though, directly and repeatedly lobbying the Director. When asked how they achieved such an unprecedented move, Authorized Association leaders insisted that you simply need to "know how to play the political game" (Authorized Association leader pers. comm., 2015) – e.g., the skills to lobby government.

Another landmark event in Enduimet relates to land use regulations, namely the integration of local livelihoods into conservation planning that defied Tanzania's normal restrictions. Remarkably, in the WMA's first RZMP (2005-2010), restrictive regulations were salient. The RZMP included dramatic regulations on grazing, which prioritised tourism-based land use at the expense of pastoralism. Some argue that the regulations, if ever actually imposed, would have decimated Enduimet's livestock production. When confronted with questions about this, many Authorized Association leaders argued that they agreed to the prohibitions to simply appease central officials – a strategic positioning vis-à-vis central authorities. Leaders were unperturbed about the regulations because they thought them unlikely to be enforced: "We agreed to some of the regulations because they are just numbers, and we know that no one can actually enforce such rules" (Authorized Association member pers. comm. 2014).

By 2010 a second RZMP was developed that contrasted sharply with the first. In this version, Authorized Association members refused to appease central officials and eliminated any reference to grazing limits. They posed a sophisticated argument about the unpredictability of dryland environments and varying levels of precipitation from year to year. Subsequently, with the exception of limits in the WMA's key elephant migration corridor (where a maximum 2000 cattle are permitted daily for grazing and water), the plan allows the Authorized Association to determine the numbers of grazing animals and mechanisms for control (Enduimet RZMP 2011). Effectively, this allows the Authorized Association to regulate grazing in a flexible manner, and in accordance with customary mechanisms and seasonal migration patterns. In spite of pressures from government and conservationists to adopt stronger restrictions, leaders and community members alike remain steadfastly opposed to such divisions. As one leader put it: "we will not divide livestock and tourism. Livestock is our life. Tourism investors must agree with this, or they are not welcome here" (Village leader pers. comm. 2013).

A third event illustrates recentralisation attempts and also the opportunities that arise in the WMA's new politics and new political space: the long-term struggle to evict a foreign tourism enterprise, Shu'mata Camp. Shu'mata first came to Sinya Village in 2007, prior to Sinya joining the WMA. In 2008, the operator secured written permission from the village to build a tented camp and conduct photographic tourism activities. Much frustration surrounded the original agreement. Some current leaders argue that it was completed with little transparency and pushed forward by a few former leaders who received financial benefits. As the years went by, grievance about the arrangement grew. Criticism arose about unfulfilled promises (e.g., a human-wildlife conflict compensation scheme that was promised by Shu'mata but apparently never delivered), alleged maltreatment of village residents by the company's owner and staff, and the low financial benefits for the village. Village leaders tried to formalize a new contract but, allegedly, the tour operator evaded such attempts, which further fueled the community's grievances.

As with Northern Hunting above, the political game changed for Shu'mata upon Sinya's entry into the WMA in 2009. In 2011, the Enduimet Authorized Association renewed the fight to institute a formal contract with Shu'mata. To the chagrin of Authorized Association members, a contract had still not been achieved in 2013, the year when I started my field research. According to many Authorized Association members, the tour operator evaded the contract to avoid its increased fees. On May 24, 2013, the Authorized Association's frustrations culminated in a full Authorized Association member meeting with the tour operator. The meeting, like many that followed, became a platform to air grievances about the company's alleged ill-treatment of the community and seeming disregard for the community's interests. "We are tired of your dishonesty. This is our land. We have authority here... You must leave," members repeatedly argued. One woman echoed common sentiments by exclaiming, "He is bringing neocolonialism."

The Authorized Association Chairperson closed the meeting with a verdict that Shu'mata must terminate its operations in the WMA.

Space will not allow a detailed account of the events that ensued since. Suffice it to say that the Authorized Association remained steadfast in its decision to evict Shu'mata, even going to extents of putting up road blocks to restrict the company's access, commandeering its vehicles and occupying the company's property. Shu'mata responded to these actions by mobilising influential elites and high-ranking central government authorities to support its case. This put immense political pressure on local government authorities, especially the District Commissioner who had seemingly maintained a genuine support for the community. "We can't simply ignore the pleas of our communities" was reportedly one of his responses to pressures from a high-ranking official (Village leader pers. comm.2013). Shu'mata's lobbying resulted in successive meetings between Authorized Association leaders and central authorities. In a memorable one in July, 2013, the District Commissioner and other central authorities insisted that the Authorized Association reconcile with Shu'mata for the sake of avoiding a lengthy court battle and most importantly, to protect Tanzania's investor climate and international reputation. Allegations flourished at this time about government corruption and central authorities' personal stakes in the business. The Authorized Association continued lobbying its case in spite of all this, going as high up as central ministry officials to plead its case. Apparently, this political maneuvering proved influential. In July 2014, Shu'mata was issued an eviction notice from the District government. The Authorized Association followed up with their own repeated notice.

Shortly thereafter, in a surprising turn, Shu'mata took the Authorized Association to court in September 2014. The company argued against the eviction and sought damages for the impacts that the conflict apparently had on the operator's business. The court case proceeded in dubious fashion for almost two years, with some Authorized Association members arguing that the court was colluding with the company. In spite of such claims though, the High Court ruled in favor of the community in September 2016. For many, this was unexpected, given the court's alleged history of privileging foreign businesses. Authorized Association members and Enduimet residents were jubilant, believing they had finally won their battle against the company. This was cut short though, as Shu'mata filed an appeal in November 2016, promising a much longer court battle and uncertain future. If the previous ruling stands, it represents an unprecedented win for Tanzania's rural communities and decentralisation efforts. If the ruling is overturned, it will be a significant loss to Enduimet and set ominous precedents for WMAs across Tanzania. Leaders insist that their actions to stop the company's operations will persist: "If the court doesn't support us, we will continue doing anything to stop its operations," exclaimed one Authorized Association leader (pers. comm. 2016).

Lake Natron WMA

The proposed Lake Natron WMA will be one of Tanzania's largest WMAs at 4500 square km² and with 32 member villages (Lake Natron CBO 2014). Like Enduimet, the area is situated in the Longido District. It lies just west of the Enduimet WMA between the Serengeti-Maasai Mara ecosystem in the west and Kilimanjaro-Amboseli ecosystem to the east. The area hosts large populations of resident and migrating wildlife. It gets its name from a sodium lake on the western boundary of the WMA, which contains a key breeding area for the Lesser Flamingo. The WMA is a prime trophy hunting area in Tanzania, incorporating five hunting blocks whose management will be part of the WMA's mandate.

Despite completing all the required registration stages in 2013 and submitting a RZMP in early 2014, at the time of writing the WMA has not been officially gazetted. The Director of Wildlife has yet to issue user-rights to Lake Natron's community-based organization (e.g., the organization that will become the WMA's Authorized Association upon receiving user-rights). The reason for the delay remains a matter of debate. Many argue that it relates to a powerful trophy hunting lobby that does not want the WMA due to the increased fees that will be instituted (CBO member, pers. comm. 2015). Officially-speaking though, the government argues that the delay surrounds disagreements about the land use regulations in the proposed RZMP. The purpose for including the Lake Natron case in this paper is to highlight this disagreement over land-use regulations, its politicization, and the CBO's resistance.

The CBO began compiling its RZMP in September 2013, with successive meetings proceeding into 2015. For our purposes, I focus primarily on three original meetings in September through December 2013, wherein conflict over grazing regulations became salient. The conflict surrounded drafts of the RZMP that was compiled by an ecologist appointed by the Tanzania National Parks Authority (TANAPA). The topic of grazing regulations arose immediately in the first meeting on September 17, 2013. The community representatives made it clear that they intended to demand a similar model to Enduimet: no prohibitions on grazing would be tolerated, and customary management systems would be maintained. "we will not separate livestock and wildlife", has been a resounding manifesto. In the first meeting Longido's Member of Parliament, a well-known advocate for pastoral livelihoods on the national scene, weighed in heavily in this discussion. He reassured CBO members that:

"Tell everyone not to worry. We will never separate livestock and wildlife. We are Maasai who depend on mobility. We will make sure that we are not prevented from continuing our customary ways."

Similar messages were repeated throughout the meetings. Furthermore, to the tourism investors present, a District councillor repeated a common message:

“This is our land. We have authority over it. We warn you. As a WMA, we will now decide who is welcome and who is not.”

As in Enduimet, long-standing grievances toward conservation, central government and trophy hunting investors was evident (see also my account of this in Wright 2016).

To the surprise of CBO participants, early drafts of the RZMP continued to include prohibitions on livestock grazing. Throughout the meetings, CBO participants vehemently contested such regulations, interrogating the RZMP to identify and remove every instance where tourism was privileged or a separation between livestock and wildlife was indicated. The following statement captures the consensus that arose in the meetings:

“We must erase the language that indicates a separation of wildlife, livestock and people. The only reason we are here discussing all this is because we’ve always conserved the wildlife in the first place. But we never separate these two things. Livestock and wildlife have always lived together. And they must continue to in the WMA.”

Another CBO leader similarly asserted the priority of livestock, arguing that, “We are putting the land aside not only for wildlife but also livestock. Livestock and wildlife. Or better if we say, livestock then wildlife.”

A third meeting in December 2013 created much controversy. Despite the extensive discussions held previously and the evident consensus surrounding integration, the RZMP still included grazing prohibitions. One large zone called the “core conservation area” was stipulated exclusively for tourism. The community was poised to lose almost 1500 square kilometers of ancestral grazing land. Upon realizing this, a fury of criticisms was directed at the meeting facilitators and organizers – namely, the personnel of the African Wildlife Foundation and a representative from Tanzania’s wildlife management college. At one point, the meeting fell into disorder despite efforts from the facilitator, with participants shouting, talking amongst themselves, and some walking out in protest. A district councilor then came forward, calling the meeting to order with the following impassioned statement directed at the meeting facilitators and central government authorities:

“We’ve sat with you for how many days now? We’ve always been of one song: livestock and wildlife will not be separated in different zones. Everyone in this room agreed to join this WMA under the condition that it will be the same as Enduimet. Grazing is permitted everywhere. Wildlife areas are livestock areas. There is no distinction. So, either agree to erase every reference to these regulations or let’s not waste time. Let’s close up this meeting and all go home. There will be no WMA in Lake Natron.”

This was met with applause and shouting. The meeting facilitators then apologized to participants. They claimed that this was an oversight on the part of the consultant who compiled the draft. They then reaffirmed to the CBO members

that, indeed, the RZMP was theirs to design and committed to revising the RZMP accordingly. The meeting concluded once again with a final consensus about livestock and wildlife integration.

Since the meetings in 2013, the Director of Wildlife expressed dissatisfaction with the CBO’s rejection of any grazing regulations (CBO leader, pers. comm. 2014). In one reported engagement between Wildlife Division officials and CBO leaders, the former insisted that the CBO must adopt principles of “*matumizi bora ya ardhi*” (improved land use) (CBO leader, pers. comm. 2014). *Matumizi bora ya ardhi* reflects a popular, modernization discourse in Tanzania often comprised of prescriptions to reduce herd sizes, regulate grazing, and maintain exclusive zones for wildlife conservation. The CBO members remained steadfast though, repeating the messages from the original meetings that it is not feasible to create exclusive conservation or tourism zones, given the need to maintain livestock mobility (CBO leader, pers. comm. 2014).

At the time of writing, the final draft of the RZMP has still not been made public. In my discussions with CBO leaders, who remain significantly involved in negotiations with the Wildlife Division, they are adamant that it will not include any universal grazing prohibitions. At most, some suggest it may include seasonal regulations that reflect already existing patterns of use (e.g., dry versus wet season grazing areas). Whatever the case, leaders remain adamant that, like Enduimet, they will continue using future RZMPs to resist the interests of investors and central authorities to exclude livestock. As argued by one,

“If the WMA jeopardizes livestock production there will be a revolt and the WMA will be terminated. This is a reality in Lake Natron, like Enduimet. Everyone knows it, including government authorities, and they don’t want a crisis” (CBO leader 2015).

DISCUSSION

Critical scholarship about WMAs emphasizes the deleterious effects of recentralising while decentralizing, including patterns of dispossession and disempowerment. In contrast to such cases and representations, the above cases reveal the political opportunities and resistance emerging out of decentralisation. These cases indicate that WMAs are, and will remain, turbulent terrains. I contend that there is a tendency in some critical scholarship to overstate the power of government to recentralise and inadvertently understate the power of Authorized Association members and their constituents to employ the new political spaces that WMAs offer – in other words, to effectively ‘play the game’ and hold government to account. Put another way, I argue that there is sometimes a bias towards the ‘practice of government’ versus the ‘practice of politics’, to recall Li’s concepts (2007).

With this in mind, the following discussion first recounts the politics of recentralising while decentralizing in Lake

Natron and Enduimet. It then proposes Anne Larson's concept of 'decentralization from below' as pertinent to the politics witnessed. It completes the section with a question about the implications these findings hold for WMAs elsewhere in Tanzania.

The decentralisation-recentralisation conundrum

In my account, while recentralising forces are certainly at play, this does not preclude important political mobilisations from below. This may, at times, facilitate compliance with central government and recentralising forces, but at other times, defiance. Therein, I argue, lies the contradiction, risks, as well as opportunities of WMAs.

In Enduimet, the decentralisation-recentralisation conundrum is evident in each of the landmark events described. The original conflict with the trophy hunting operator ultimately reflects the government's recentralisation dictates, and their maintenance of central control over land-use and wildlife utilization in Sinya. Recentralisation was then also evident in the Director of Wildlife's reported resistance to Enduimet's second RZMP, which eliminated the contentious hunting area and proposed a full integration of livestock production, conservation, and tourism. In the Shu'mata case, the central government's resistance was a clear case of recentralising central authority and power, despite the legal provisions that should empower the Authorized Association to determine business operations in WMA land.

But Enduimet's case also reveals how Authorized Association members are leveraging decentralisation for their interests and the possibilities that are arising within the new political spaces that have opened up. The achievements encapsulated in the second RZMP are illustrative. Despite pressures from central authorities, members eliminated the contentious hunting area and instituted their preference for photographic tourism. Further, they protected customary systems of management and land use by omitting the grazing restrictions that characterized the first RZMP. In the case of Shu'mata, while at first the case seemed to substantiate recentralisation criticisms, the Authorized Association's unrelenting actions to evict the operator illuminates WMAs' new terrains of citizen-government engagement. The recent court victory supported their struggle.

Similarly, in Lake Natron, forces of recentralisation were obvious but so also were the opportunities afforded by decentralisation. In many regards, the Lake Natron case typifies the contradictions of Tanzania's recentralisation-decentralisation conundrum. The originally proposed RZMP befits the central government's fortress conservation orthodoxy, long-standing biases and patterns of privileging global tourism (e.g., maintaining exclusive tourism zones). The Authorized Association rejected this and leveraged their decentralized authority, insisting on a revised RZMP that reflects their interests and customary systems of integrating conservation and livestock production. The Director of Wildlife's original rejection of the RZMP and insistence on '*matumizi bora ya*

ardhi' (modern land use) reflects a clear effort to undermine decentralised authority and impose livestock-wildlife separations. The Authorized Association persisted in their demands, reportedly arriving at a satisfactory RZMP.

Overall, then, the cases of Enduimet and Lake Natron WMAs defy representations that reduce them to mere instruments of recentralisation. While it is clear that central authorities have tried to limit decentralisation and maintain central power through formal and informal avenues, the Authorized Association leaders have adamantly resisted this via the political spaces of decentralised regimes. I maintain that the cases above represent decentralisation precedents that will have ripple effects for Enduimet and Lake Natron's future negotiations vis à vis central government and foreign capital power. Ripple effects that will undoubtedly run through other rural landscapes as well.

Decentralisation from below – some hope for WMAs?

As already mentioned, Anne Larson's concept of 'decentralization from below' (Larson 2005; Larson and Soto 2008) is pertinent to our understanding of recentralising-decentralising conundrums. As in the cases above, 'decentralization from below' captures the processes whereby local authorities resist recentralisation, hold central authorities to account and effectively maintain discretionary powers. This concept succinctly captures the dynamics that I have witnessed in Lake Natron and Enduimet.

Larson importantly emphasizes three primary domains that influence decentralisation outcomes (2003: 220): the legal structural domain (e.g., policies and regulations); the domain of government intervention and commitment (e.g., the various 'mediating factors' that limit and constrain decentralisation efforts); and lastly, the local decision-making domain. Of most pertinence here, is this latter domain and the politics that can emerge. Recalling my reference to Li (2007), the domain encapsulates the primary site of WMAs' 'practice of politics'. In this regard, Larson highlights a host of factors that influence the degree to which local mobilisations will keep central government accountable and effectively resist its recentralisation efforts. These factors include skills and capacities of local authorities and constituents, local power relations, economic incentive structures and ideological factors related to the environment and society. I draw attention especially to Larson's emphasis on what Leonardo Romeo calls "interactive capacities" (Larson 2003: 221). Importantly, these include the ability to effectively mediate conflicts, build support and navigate power relations and networks often across scales and often including diverse actors, such as government authorities, private sector players, NGOs, other civil society associations and constituents. Romeo uses the concept, 'interactive capacities', to differentiate the above interrelation and political skills from what he calls, 'internal capacities' – namely, the more technical skills required for operational management. While the latter are important, 'decentralisation from below' especially relies on the former.

Many of Larson's highlighted skills and capacities were demonstrated in Enduimet and Lake Natron's resistance to recentralisation forces. In each of the conflicts illustrated, Authorized Association leaders demonstrated important knowledge about WMA policies and the powers transferred to them. More importantly, they were remarkably astute in their negotiations with the various actors implicated and the strategic alliances they built accordingly (e.g., interactive capacity). They knew and played the 'political game' well, as articulated in one of the above statements. In Enduimet, the conflict with Shu'mata investors is the best case in point. This conflict has comprised repeated meetings and efforts at every scale, from village-level alliance building, to persisting meetings with district officials, regional authorities, and even central government officers. Based on my observations, Enduimet's leaders conveyed remarkable patience and political acumen, knowing especially when to adopt overt, forceful means (e.g., road blocks) and when to adopt covert and more diplomatic ones. Lake Natron leaders have similarly been involved in much deliberative action to bolster support and build alliances with key central government authorities and facilitating NGOs.

Time alone will tell whether such a 'decentralisation from below' will continue to maintain achievements in Enduimet and Lake Natron, or whether recentralising forces will ultimately erode efforts and reconsolidate central control. It seems certain though that the interactive capacities, political acumen and strong alliances within both WMAs represent a significant countervailing force.

In light of all this, one question that remains is, can such achievements be realized in other WMAs in Tanzania? The parameters of this paper do not permit a detailed response to this question. Suffice it to say that the barriers facing many WMAs are certainly daunting. Many WMAs were registered via coercive and deceptive means, which makes progress today challenging. Their current politics are often defined by oppressive political environments, histories of social division, elite capture, lack of transparencies, and clientelism – what De Waal aptly refers to as, 'political marketplaces' (2009, 2015). All of these factors can bedevil decentralisation, pervert local governance and exacerbate internal conflict. Based on Bluwstein et al.'s (2016) and Moyo et al.'s (2016) recent work, Burunge WMA seems to be a case in point of much of the above history, politics and trends.

In contrast, prevailing politics, history and social composition are different in Lake Natron and Enduimet WMAs. As already stated, a host of factors favor decentralisation from below in the Lake Natron and Enduimet WMAs. Their leadership and residents are predominantly Maasai with a shared interest in pastoralism as their primary livelihood. Their relative ethnic homogeneity, a history of resistance and a remarkable unity of interests are all advantageous characteristics. Further, central government representatives at the District level (e.g., District Commissioner) proved less autocratic than elsewhere. All in all, this makes Lake Natron and Enduimet different.

Nevertheless, I contend that similar achievements are possible elsewhere. Authorized Associations have been

transferred unprecedented authority via WMA regulations. This offers novel opportunities for new politics, alliances, networks and new state-society relations. They represent entirely 'new political landscapes', as put by one WMA legal advisor. I argue that while the current status of so many WMAs is disappointing at present, this does not preclude new directions. As Larson's work emphasises, in spite of recentralising forces, with sufficient skills, capacities, incentives and grass-roots demand there remains hope for leveraging decentralisation in favor of local priorities. Lund and Saito-Jensen's (2013) analysis of decentralised forestry in Tanzania substantiates this optimism. In their long term, longitudinal studies, they illustrate how early deleterious effects of recentralisation, elite capture and control can be overcome in time. In their accounts, adverse power relations can shift in positive directions as previously marginal actors become more politically aware and mobilised, steering decentralised management in populist directions.

But following Bluwstein et al.'s analysis (2016), effective decentralisation must be accompanied with democratisation. Without democratisation and corresponding accountabilities (e.g., between Authorized Associations and village constituents), WMA governance and outcomes can remain adverse for large proportions of the population. Ultimately, in Enduimet and Lake Natron WMAs, the general congruency of interests between leaders and the vast majority of constituents has mitigated social division and dispossession. In places like Burunge WMA though, heterogeneous livelihoods and diverse interests are ominously pitting Authorized Association leaders against village constituents, pitting some villages against other villages, fostering social division and ultimately, threatening minority groups. Certainly, much work remains in WMAs like Burunge to not only counter recentralising forces but also resolve its internal conflicts, which further handicap the emergence of 'decentralization from below'.

CONCLUSION

The most defining feature of WMAs remains the politics emerging out of the contradictions of decentralisation and recentralisation. While theoretically a decentralisation model, the practice of WMAs is characterized by recentralisation efforts that often circumvent the power of Authorized Associations and corresponding constituents. Notwithstanding these forces, WMAs invoke new political spaces that can offer opportunities for communities to contest and resist recentralisation. In such spaces, novel alliances and newly forged political communities are fostering 'decentralisation from below', holding central government accountable and resisting foreign capital appropriations. Subsequently, at least in cases like Enduimet and Lake Natron, WMAs are not necessarily amounting to the reconsolidation of state control, accumulation by dispossession and green grabbing. Rather, these cases illuminate the 'practice of politics' (Li 2007) that are proving to challenge 'recentralizing while decentralizing' (Ribot et al. 2006). They demonstrate the complexity of decentralisation's state-society

reconfigurations and, accordingly, the hope of new politics in WMAs' turbulent terrains.

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NOTE

1. The Wildlife Conservation (Tourist Hunting) Regulations (2000) made joint ventures illegal within any village land that overlaps with government hunting blocks (without special permission from the Wildlife Division); the Wildlife Conservation (Non-Consumptive) Regulations (2007) recentralized the management of tourism activities in village land, instituting a schedule of fees and requiring tourism companies to pay the central government; and the Wildlife Conservation Act (2009) further complicated matters by reregulating land use in Game Controlled Areas (GCA), which overlap with village land and are where most joint ventures have historically been situated.

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